



June 18, 2020

TO: Officials-in-Charge of Headquarters Offices
Directors, NASA Centers

FROM: Associate Administrator

SUBJECT: Changes to the NASA Dissenting Opinion Process

Over several months, culminating in a presentation to the APMC on February 5, 2020, a small team representing the Office of Safety and Mission Assurance, the Office of the Chief Engineer and the Office of the Chief Health and Medical Officer proposed changes to the NASA Dissenting Opinion process. This assessment was in part motivated by the Business Services Assessment deep dive on Technical Authority which originated in the 2017-2018 timeframe. When the team presented their recommendations to the APMC, the NASA leadership immediately accepted their recommendation to change the nomenclature from “Dissenting Opinion (DO)” to “Formal Dissent (FD)”. The former term implies that the dissent could be based on something other than data, which is an expectation of any dissent brought forward regarding a program or project decision. I have therefore directed that any NASA documentation containing the term “Dissenting Opinion” be modified to change that nomenclature to “Formal Dissent”.

The team also proposed an option to allow each Center to adjudicate FD’s at their level. This proposal violated the fundamental principle allowing individuals or organizations to elevate their dissent to higher levels of management up to and including the Administrator (see NPD 1000.0C, section 3.5.4). As a result, this proposal was not accepted by the APMC.

Recognizing the importance of clarifying the FD process, the team provided a modified proposal to a subset of the APMC membership. Instead of allowing the Centers to adjudicate FD’s at their respective levels, the modified proposal allows each Center Director to determine if an FD presented at their level requires an expedited resolution, and at which level within the Agency the expedited dissent should be adjudicated (Mission Directorate or Agency Associate Administrator). Note that this option does not imply that a full meeting of the appropriate decision entity (e.g., DPMC, APMC) is required. Given the positive response by the convened leadership, I have accepted the modified FD proposal. In doing so, I am recognizing that the Centers have the vast majority of the technical expertise in a particular area, and have access to key individuals as their technical leaders to inform him or her of the relative importance of a particular FD.

My expectations are that (1) each Center shall update or create Technical Authority Implementation Plan(s) to reflect this change in Center responsibilities; (2) in accordance with Agency/Center documentation, whenever an FD is raised, it shall be documented and communicated at a minimum of two levels of management above the original program/project decision; and (3) each Center shall maintain a listing of FD's brought forward at their Center, including the current status, whether or not the FD has been elevated, and to which level. Regarding item (1) above, this is fully in-line with the new language in NPD 1000.0C, section 3.5.1, para 3, subsection (d), in that the Technical Authorities are now responsible for implementing the Dissenting Opinion (now Formal Dissent) process. Additional language in NASA overarching policy will be included to reflect this modified step in the established process.

I see this decision as improving our decision-making process while preserving the ability of individuals to raise issues with program/project decisions. Both the dissenter and the original decision maker for critical Agency issues will obtain a rapid evaluation of the FD at the appropriate levels within the Agency with all of the required individuals involved in the discussion. My expectation is that NASA leadership will start to implement this modified process immediately for any FD's that may arise at your Centers. Finally, and of no less importance, my expectation is that you will communicate this change at the earliest opportunity to your entire workforce in a forum of your choice for most effective communications.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Stephen G. Jurczyk". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid, with a large, stylized 'J' and 'y'.

Stephen G. Jurczyk